

**Communications Strategy**  
**Release of**  
**EC 1105-2-408 Peer Review of Decision Documents**  
(24 June 2005)

**Project:** To manage the communications involved with the public release of EC 1105-2-408, Peer Review of Decision Documents. This circular sets formal processes and guidance for all levels of USACE for the peer review of projects and studies related to the water resources mission. The circular also provides Congress, the administration, other agencies, stakeholders, critics and the public with information about the formal processes to be used by the Corps for peer review – an area that has received a great deal of attention in the media in recent years because of concerns raised within Congress and by critics of the Corps. The two-year implementation of the circular will provide the Corps with valuable operational information/lessons learned as it works toward the development of a final engineer regulation on this topic.

EC 1105-2-408 is being released concurrently with EC 11-5-2-409 Planning in a Collaborative Environment. A single press release will announce the publication of both circulars.

**Purpose/Intent:**

1. This strategy will provide talking points, a news release, and questions and answers associated with the release of EC 1105-2-408 Peer Review of Decision Documents.
2. Some national news coverage of the release is expected, as the topic addressed in the circular has been of interest in past media coverage. Primary interest will be from publications that have demonstrated prior interest in the Corps' peer review processes. Environmental and trade press can also be expected to be interested in the circular.
3. The release of this circular can also be expected to generate potential news releases from organizations that traditionally critique USACE for not utilizing peer review in highly complex, controversial and costly projects and studies, and for not taking the process far enough to address all their concerns.
4. Distribution of a USACE news release announcing the publication of the two circulars and addressing their purposes and benefits as they relate to the execution of the water resources mission will enable the Corps to get out its initial message points prior to potential releases by other organizations.
5. The following is the proposed course of action:
  - First, details about the two circulars will be briefed to the House and Senate Energy and Water Authorizing Committees staffs.
  - Second, USACE Public Affairs will distribute pre-approved talking points and questions and answers to all Corps public affairs officers approximately 24-48 hours prior to the public release of the circulars.
  - Third, USACE Public Affairs will issue a news release announcing the release of the circulars and will be prepared to respond to media queries.
  - Fourth, USACE Directorate of Civil Works will post the circulars to the web and to the Hot Topics page concurrently with the time of the news release.
  - Fifth, the Office of Management and Budget and appropriate federal principals/agencies (to include the National Research Council) will be notified concurrent with the release of the circulars.
  - Sixth, project sponsors, other stakeholders and national organizations that are affiliated with Corps issues (Nature Conservancy, American Rivers, National Wildlife Federation, floodplain managers, ports, other navigation interests, etc.) will be notified about the availability of the circulars concurrent with their release.
  - Seventh, designated CW staff principals must be prepared to support USACE PAO in responding to media queries about the circulars. The queries will primarily be telephonic and calls may come from all over the nation.
  - Eighth, an internal USACE training plan to familiarize all levels of the Corps with the new ECs will be developed, distributed and executed by Harry Kitch.

**Communications Matrix - (Release 27 JUN 05)**

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	DATE/TIME ACTION IS TO OCCUR	METHOD OF ACTION	DATE ACTION OCCURED
Brief ASA(CW) on report	Harry Kitch	29 APR 05	In person	29 APR 05
Brief House Authorization Committee staff	Harry Kitch	6 JUN 05	In person	6 JUN 05
Brief Senate Authorization Committee staff	Harry Kitch	16 JUN 05	In person	16 JUN 05
Distribute communications strategy to all USACE PAOs	Gene Pawlik	24 JUN 05	Email	24 JUN 05
Distribute new release	Gene Pawlik	27 JUN 05 – 0900	USNEWswire/ USACE web	
Post circulars to USACE web/ Hot Topics	Harry Kitch/ IM	27 JUN 05 – 0900	Internet	
<b>Notify other appropriate federal agencies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dept. of Interior</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- U.S. Fish and Wildlife</li> <li>- U.S. Geological Survey</li> <li>- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation</li> <li>- U.S. National Park Service</li> <li>- Bureau of Indian Affairs</li> <li>- U.S. Bureau of Land Management</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Dept. of Commerce</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NOAA</li> <li>- National Marine Fisheries Service</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>EPA</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Office of Federal Activities</li> <li>- Office of Water</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Dept. of Transportation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maritime Administration</li> <li>- Federal Highways Admin.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Dept. of Housing and Urban Development</b></li> <li>• <b>Dept. of Agriculture</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National Resources Conservation Service</li> <li>- U.S. Forest Service</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Dept. of Homeland Security</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- FEMA</li> <li>- U.S. Coast Guard</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Gene Pawlik	27 JUN 05 following news release/web posting	Email copy of news release	
Notify National Research Council	Harry Kitch/ Bruce Carlson	27 JUN 05 -	email	

<b>Notify associated national organizations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Society of Civil Engineers</li> <li>• American Water Resources Association</li> <li>• American Association of Port Authorities</li> <li>• American Planning Assoc.</li> <li>• Association of State Floodplain Managers</li> <li>• The Nature Conservancy</li> <li>• American Rivers</li> <li>• National Wildlife Federation</li> <li>• Audubon Society</li> <li>• Sierra Club</li> <li>• MARC 2000</li> <li>• National Recreation and Park Association</li> <li>• American Recreation Coalition</li> <li>• Association of Marina Industries</li> <li>• Tread Lightly, Inc.</li> <li>• International Mountain Biking Association</li> <li>• National Association of State Park Directors</li> <li>• Association of Partners for Public Lands</li> </ul>	Gene Pawlik	27 JUN 05 following news release/web posting	Email copy of news release	
Notify appropriate project sponsors/stakeholders	MSCs/ districts	Beginning 27 JUN 05 following news release	Various – district discretion	
Brief Office of Management and Budget	Harry Kitch/ Doug Lamont	18 JUL 05 - 1400	In person	

### **Talking Points:**

#### **General (applicable to both ECs)**

1. The publication of the Peer Review of Decision Documents and Planning in a Collaborative Environment engineer circulars represents a significant step forward for formalizing improved planning and decision processes within the USACE Civil Works program.
2. The guidance contained within the Peer Review of Decision Documents and Planning in a Collaborative Environment engineer circulars will provide USACE, Congress, other federal agencies, stakeholders and the public with a greater understanding of the Civil Works program and will set expectations for how the program will be conducted.
3. Implementing the guidance contained within the Peer Review of Decision Documents and Planning in a Collaborative Environment engineer circulars will enhance the nation's confidence in the quality and credibility of its Civil Works program.
4. Publication of engineer circulars provides USACE with a two-year window to operate under the principles and guidelines of the circulars; the flexibility to change and adapt during that timeframe as lessons are learned and greater efficiencies are found; and to apply the lessons

learned toward the development of final engineer regulations to be published after the circulars expire.

#### **EC 1105-2-408 Peer Review of Decision Documents**

1. The Peer Review of Decision Documents EC establishes procedures to ensure the quality and credibility of Corps decision documents by adjusting and supplementing the current review process to ensure the transparency and independence of review.
2. Review plans are a required part of every Project Management Plan (PMP) and will be published on the web. Review documentation will become part of the final decision document.
3. The Peer Review of Decision Documents EC presents a framework for establishing the appropriate level and independence of review for decision documents covered by the circular.
4. USACE retains its existing Independent Technical Review (ITR) process – a seamless, ongoing part of the entire planning process – that utilizes both Corps and non-Corps reviewers who have not been associated with the product.
5. USACE Planning Centers of Expertise will manage the ITR / peer review process for planning studies. The EC also establishes an external peer review process that is further removed from the Corps for special cases.
6. External peer review is added to the Corps' existing review process in those special cases where the risk and magnitude of a proposed project are such that a critical examination by a qualified person or team outside of the Corps – and not involved in the day-to-day production of a technical product – is necessary.
7. External peer review will be added in cases where information is based on novel methods, presents complex challenges for interpretation, contains precedent-setting methods or models, presents conclusions that are likely to change prevailing practices, or is likely to affect policy decisions that have a significant impact.
8. The Peer Review of Decision Documents circular applies to “scientific information”, “influential scientific information”, “scientific assessment”, and “highly influential scientific assessment” as defined in the Office of Management and Budget’s Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review
9. Peer review will not address policy issues and decision making that results in study recommendations. Policy review is the responsibility of the Corps and the Army and will continue to be accomplished according to existing policy review procedures.
10. The Peer Review of Decision Documents EC applies to all decision documents that require congressional authorization.
11. The EC provides the flexibility for USACE vertical teams comprised of district, major subordinate command and Headquarters members to choose to apply the peer review procedures of the circular to any study or report if they determine it is advisable to do so.
12. To the maximum extent practicable, peer reviews shall be conducted in a manner so as to not cause delays in study or project completion.

#### **Q&As:**

##### **Q: What is the purpose of the Peer Review of Decision Documents EC?**

A: The Peer Review of Decision Documents engineer circular adjusts and supplements the Corps' current review process to further ensure the quality and credibility of future Corps decision documents. The circular presents a framework for establishing the appropriate level and

independence of review, assigns responsibility for conducting Independent Technical Review (ITR) and External Peer Review (EPR) of applicable decision documents to the Planning Centers of Expertise (PCX), and details requirements of review documentation and dissemination.

**Q: What decision document review process is currently used by USACE?**

A: Under the existing review process, USACE districts are responsible for reviewing the technical aspects of decision documents through an approach called “independent technical review” (ITR). ITR is a critical examination by a qualified person or team that was not involved in the day-to-day technical work that supports the development of a decision document. ITR is intended to confirm that the technical work was done in accordance with clearly established professional principles, practices, codes and criteria. It is seamless, ongoing throughout the planning processes, and often involves participation by experts elsewhere in the Corps as well as from other agencies, universities and consultants. In addition to ITR, decision documents are reviewed throughout the study process for law and policy compliance. Policy review culminates in a Washington-level policy compliance review conducted at the conclusion of the study to assure that the recommendations in the report comply with policy and that the report is ready for preparation of the draft Chief’s Report.

**Q: Are all USACE Civil Works decision documents now subject to peer review?**

A: The circular will generally not apply to decision documents that may be approved by a USACE division commander. Those include reconnaissance reports that lead to feasibility reports; decision documents prepared under the Continuing Authorities Programs; post-authorization decision documents where approval authority has been delegated to the division commander in EC 1165-2-205, Delegation of Review and Approval Authority for Post-Authorization Decision Documents; and, other types of studies and reports defined in ER 1105-2-100, Planning Guidance Notebook, paragraph 4-1c.

**Q: Does EC 1105-2-408 provide flexibility for the types of decision documents listed above to undergo peer review?**

A: Yes. A USACE vertical team (involving district, major subordinate command and Headquarters members) may choose to apply the peer review procedures of the circular to any study or report if they determine it is advisable to do so.

**Q: What elements of USACE decision documents will be subject to peer review per this circular?**

A: The Peer Review of Decision Documents circular applies to “scientific information”, “influential scientific information”, “scientific assessment”, and “highly influential scientific assessment” as defined in the Office of Management and Budget’s Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, paragraphs I(5) - I(7) and III(1). This includes factual inputs, data, the use of models, analyses, assumptions, and other scientific and engineering matters that inform decision-making. In the Corps, this typically includes but is not limited to: economic and environmental assumptions and projections, evaluation data, economic analyses, environmental analyses, engineering analyses (including hydrology and hydraulics, geotechnical, structural, etc.), methods for integrating risk and uncertainty and for conducting trade-offs, and the use of models in the evaluation of engineering, economic and environmental effects.

**Q: What elements of USACE decision documents will not be subject to peer review per this circular?**

A: The circular does not apply to policy determinations and reviews, and agency exercise of discretionary authority that are beyond the scope of scientific and engineering peer review. Policy matters beyond the scope of peer review include, but are not limited to: adherence to federal, Army and USACE policies, and selection of a recommended plan.

**Q: Who is responsible for policy review?**

A: Policy review is the responsibility of the Corps and the Army and will continue to be accomplished according to existing policy review procedures.

**Q: How will policy comments be addressed if they are raised during the course of peer review?**

A: Policy comments that may be raised during peer reviews covered by the Peer Review of Decision Documents circular will be provided to the district or other Corps office responsible for the decision document under review for consideration through existing policy review procedures.

**Q: How will the existing process be changed to incorporate external peer review?**

A: External peer review (EPR) is added to the Corps' existing review process in those special cases where the risk and magnitude of a proposed project are such that a critical examination by a qualified person or team outside of the Corps – and not involved in the day-to-day production of a technical product – is necessary. EPR will similarly be added in cases where information is based on novel methods, presents complex challenges for interpretation, contains precedent-setting methods or models, presents conclusions that are likely to change prevailing practices, or is likely to affect policy decisions that have a significant impact.

**Q: What is the incorporation of external peer review expected to bring to the process that doesn't exist under the current review system?**

A: External peer review should be conducted to identify, explain, and comment upon assumptions that underlie economic, engineering, and environmental analyses, as well as to evaluate the soundness of models and planning methods. Panels should also be able to evaluate whether the interpretations of analysis and conclusions based on analysis are reasonable. Review panels are not expected to make a recommendation on whether a particular alternative should be implemented, as the Chief of Engineers is ultimately responsible for the final decision on a planning or re-operations study, but may offer their opinions as to whether there are sufficient analyses upon which to base a recommendation for construction, authorization, or funding. Review panels should be given the flexibility to bring important issues to the attention of decision makers.

**Q: Won't incorporating external peer review add additional time to USACE's project study process?**

A: To the maximum extent practicable, peer reviews shall be conducted in a manner so as to not cause delays in study or project completion.

**Q: How will external peer review be funded?**

A: Both independent technical review and external peer review are expected to be completed before the District Commander signs the report; therefore all peer review costs shall be cost shared.

**Q: When will USACE identify the need to perform external peer review as part of the process?**

A: The Corps office that is responsible for each decision document covered by EC 1105-2-408 will be required to have a peer review plan included in its Project Management Plan. The plan will state whether the decision document will undergo ITR only or both ITR and EPR.

**Q: Under what circumstances will only independent technical review be used?**

A: Peer review requirements will be fulfilled by ITR if the subject matter (including data, use of models, assumptions, and other scientific and engineering information) is not novel, is non-controversial, is not precedent setting, does not have significant interagency interest, and does not have significant economic, environmental and social effects to the nation. The level of peer review should be commensurate with the significance of the information being reviewed.

**Q: Who can participate in the conduct of independent technical review?**

A: Subject matter experts from within the Corps or outside the Corps may conduct ITR. Peer reviewers shall be selected by the PCX based on expertise, experience, and skills, including specialists from multiple disciplines as necessary to ensure comprehensive review. Peer reviewers shall not have participated in development of the report, appendix, or other work product to be reviewed.

**Q: Who can participate in the conduct of external peer review?**

A: Subject matter experts outside the Corps must accomplish external peer review.

**Q: What are the key elements of the peer review plan?**

A: The plan will include the timing of the peer review; the anticipated number of reviewers; a description of the primary disciplines and expertise needed for the review; whether external peer reviewers (if needed) will be selected by the Corps or by a designated outside organization; and, whether the public will have opportunities to comment on the peer reviewed document.

**Q: Who is responsible for the conduct of reviews of decision documents covered by this circular?**

A: USACE Planning Centers of Expertise (PCX) are responsible for the accomplishment and quality of ITR and external peer review for decision documents covered by this circular. Reviews will be assigned to the appropriate PCX based on Corps business programs. For decision documents with multiple purposes or not clearly aligned with a business program, the Planning Advisory Board, comprised of the leaders of the Planning Community of Practice at the Headquarters and Division offices, will assign decision documents to a PCX to conduct the review. Centers may conduct the ITR or may manage the review to be conducted by others. Centers will manage rather than conduct EPR because of the requirement to use subject matter experts outside the Corps.

**Q: Can external peer review be managed by an organization other than USACE?**

A: In exceptional cases involving high risk and uncertainty, first attempts at applying new technologies, or extreme public or scientific controversy, or other circumstances which could have significant adverse national implications or consequences, the Chief of Engineers may direct a PCX to contract both the management and accomplishment of EPR to an outside entity such as the National Academy of Science.

**Q: Can an entity outside USACE request an external peer review of a decision document be done?**

A: The Chief of Engineers will consider directing a PCX to conduct an EPR whenever the governor of an affected state or the head of a federal agency requests the external peer review of a decision document or portions thereof.

**Q: Will USACE have a central Internet database that can be referenced to see what studies or projects are undergoing peer review?**

A: The Headquarters, Office of Water Policy Review (OWPR), will establish and maintain a web site that lists all the review plans and provides links to the appropriate Planning Center of Expertise. OWPR will also establish a mechanism for allowing the public to comment on the adequacy of the review plans, and shall consider public comments on review plans. Each PCX shall post on its website, and update at least every three months, an agenda of peer review plans. The agenda will describe all decision documents covered by the circular in the Center's area of responsibility, and describe the review plan for each entry on the agenda.



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**

# NEWS RELEASE

**Release No. PA-05-06**

**For Release: 27 June 2005  
0900 Eastern**

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## **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers formalizes and improves its peer review and collaborative planning processes with the release of two new engineer circulars**

**Washington (June 27, 2005)** - The United States Army Corps of Engineers today released two engineer circulars that will formalize and improve the peer review and collaborative planning processes used by the Corps in its performance of the nation's Civil Works program.

Engineer Circular 1105-2-408, Peer Review of Decision Documents, and Engineer Circular 1105-2-409, Planning in a Collaborative Environment, both dated 31 May 2005, provide all levels of the Corps with formal guidance on how peer review and collaboration are to be implemented and integrated in the Civil Works program. The circulars will also provide external stakeholders and the general public with a greater understanding of the processes the Corps will use in the future execution of the Civil Works mission.

"The publication of the peer review and collaborative planning circulars are important steps in the Corps' ongoing efforts to find ways to more effectively serve the nation," said Maj. Gen. Don T. Riley, USACE's Director of Civil Works.

"The circulars are the result of the Corps taking a hard look at its internal processes and in listening to our external stakeholders about critical issues that need to be addressed in the Civil Works program," added Riley. "Implementing the guidance in the circulars will help to maintain and improve the confidence of our many partners and the American public in the credibility and quality of the program."

Publication of engineer circulars provides USACE with a two-year window to operate under the procedures in the circulars, while also providing flexibility to change and adapt as lessons are learned and greater efficiencies are found during that time frame.

Both the Peer Review of Decision Documents and the Planning in a Collaborative Environment circulars are set to expire on Sept. 30, 2007, at which time the Corps expects to publish a final engineer regulation that will incorporate the lessons learned while operating under the circulars.

### **Peer Review of Decision Documents**

Engineer Circular 1105-2-408, Peer Review of Decision Documents, presents a framework for establishing the appropriate level and independence of review for decision documents covered by the circular.

The circular applies to the review of "scientific information", "influential scientific information", "scientific assessment", and "highly influential scientific assessment" as defined in the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review. This includes

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## **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers releases Peer Review of Decision Documents and Planning in a Collaborative Environment engineer circulars/2-2-2**

factual inputs, data, the use of models, analyses, assumptions, and other scientific and engineering matters that inform decision-making.

In the Corps, this typically includes but is not limited to: economic and environmental assumptions and projections, evaluation data, economic analyses, environmental analyses, engineering analyses (including hydrology and hydraulics, geotechnical, structural, etc.), methods for integrating risk and uncertainty and for conducting trade-offs, and the use of models in the evaluation of engineering, economic and environmental effects.

The circular does not apply to policy determinations and reviews, and agency exercise of discretionary authority that are beyond the scope of scientific and engineering peer review. Policy review remains a USACE and Army responsibility.

The Peer Review of Decision Documents circular provides guidance for when external peer review is to be added to the Corps' existing independent technical review (ITR) and legal and policy compliance review processes.

ITR is an ongoing part of the Corps' planning process intended to confirm that technical work is done in accordance with clearly established professional principles, practices, codes and criteria. A qualified person or team not involved in the day-to-day technical work supporting the development of a decision document performs ITR. Experts from other agencies, universities and consultants are often involved as well.

External peer review is added in those special cases where the risk and magnitude of a proposed project are such that a critical examination by a qualified person or team outside of the Corps – and not involved in the day-to-day production of a technical product – is necessary.

External peer review will be conducted to identify, explain and comment upon assumptions that underlie economic, engineering, and environmental analyses, as well as to evaluate the soundness of models and planning methods. It will also be added in cases where information is based on novel methods; presents complex challenges for interpretation; contains precedent-setting methods or models; presents conclusions that are likely to change prevailing practices; or is likely to affect policy decisions that have a significant impact.

### **Planning in a Collaborative Environment**

Engineer Circular 1105-2-409, Planning in a Collaborative Environment, reflects improvements to the Corps' approach to water resources planning. It is designed to facilitate problem solving and decision making for specific projects as well as a more collaborative and systems-based approach to working with other federal and state agencies in developing solutions that integrate programs, policies, and projects across public agencies.

"This document is a significant update of the Corps' planning guidance," said Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works John Paul Woodley, Jr. "It reflects a watershed-level approach in examining the Nation's water resources needs and is predicated on fully collaborative efforts, in the broadest context possible, by project sponsors, state and federal agencies, and other stakeholders necessary to bring these projects to fruition."

Collaboration is the keystone of the Corps' watershed approach and is essential to the success of watershed scale planning. Collaborative planning will involve not only traditional non-federal cost sharing sponsors in partnership with the Corps, but also representatives from other federal, state and local agencies and Tribes who will bring expertise, programs and projects to study teams.

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**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers releases Peer Review of Decision Documents and Planning in a Collaborative Environment engineer circulars/3-3-3**

Collaborative planning in Corps studies may lead to a more coordinated and streamlined regulatory process, and in a plan with components to be implemented by the Corps and other federal, state and local agencies. The Corps will also participate as a team member in other federal, state or local agencies collaborative planning activities where there may be no expectation of Corps construction or other work.

Collaborative planning will ensure problems are solved at the proper scale with integrated agency purposes, and will more effectively leverage federal and other funds.

Engineer Circular 1105-2-408, Peer Review of Decision Documents, and Engineer Circular 1105-2-409, Planning in a Collaborative Environment, can be accessed on the web at <http://www.usace.army.mil/publications/eng-circulars/ec-cw.html>.

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*For additional information about the United States Army Corps of Engineers, please visit our new web page at [www.usace.army.mil](http://www.usace.army.mil).*